**Ethnic Discrimination**

One of the fundamental bedrocks of human rights is the principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Discrimination and persecution on the grounds of race and ethnicity are clear violations of this principle. Racial discrimination can take many forms from the most brutal and institutional form of racisms - genocide and *apartheid*, to more covert forms whereby certain racial and ethnic groups are prevented from enjoying the same civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as other groups in society.

Racial and ethnic discrimination continues to be a major human rights problem in the world today facing both minority and sometimes even majority populations. Much of the early focus of international attention was on apartheid in South Africa which came to an end in 1994. However, the struggle against ethnic and racial hatred has continued with the decade of the 1990's being riven with some of the worst ethnic conflicts the world has ever seen in the Balkans and the Great Lakes region in Africa.

Race is defined as "a group of people of common ancestry, distinguished from others by physical characteristics such as hair type, colour of eyes and skin, stature etc". (Collins English Dictionary) Ethnic is defined as "relating to or characteristic of a human group having racial, religious, linguistic and certain other traits in common". (Collins English dictionary)

In international human rights law the term race is generally used in a broader sense and often blurs with other distinctions between groups of people based on religion, ethnicity, social groupings, language and culture. The term "race" in human rights law is sometimes used to encompass groups which may not fall into distinctive biological racial groupings, for example caste systems in India and Japan.

The [International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](http://www.hrea.org/erc/Library/display.php?doc_id=595&category_id=35&category_type=3&group=Human%20rights%20treaties%20and%20other%20instruments) (article 1) does not define "race" but it does define "racial discrimination" to mean "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life." Ethnicity is explicitly subsumed under this definition by the term "race". Most human rights treaties simply refer to "race" and do not use the terminology of "ethnicity".